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Idealism of the Early Buddhist Suttas And The Emergence of the Monastic Image

For purposes of more precise Academic Study let us recast the heading as

The Buddhist Monastic Order and the Genesis of the Vinaya

1. Nirvanic ideal as the goal of religious life propounded by the Buddha.

The antithesis between **Samsāra** and **Nirvana** is the hall-mark of Buddhism. Samsāra is **dukkha** [i.e. unsatisfactoriness and painfulness of life of humans in the world, reflected in being born, going through decay, disease and death and this being cyclically repeated infinitely. To this is added the vast turmoil of destruction and disaster which humans create by their demonic ingenuity.]. Nirvana is invariably the cessation of that *dukkha* or **dukkha-nirodha**. **Early Buddhism**, and its teachings as declared by the Buddha himself [and as far as we can gather], spin around these twin concepts of the Four Noble Truths, i.e. Nos. 1 & 3. [Listen to the Buddha as he tells us so at MN. I. p. 140 *Pubbe cā' haṃ bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhañ c' eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ* = In former times, O monks, as well as now, it is the subject of **dukkha** that I make known to the world and the **cessation of dukkha**].

Early suttas put this idea of Samsāra and release therefrom in this manner. The Buddha first introduces to the world his complete thesis, i.e. his conviction through his own analysis of the human predicament [i.e. the totality of *dukkha*] in which humans are caught up as follows: *Kicchaṃ vatā ' yaṃ loko āpanno jāyati ca jīyati ca mīyati ca cavati va uppajjati ca* = The world is plunged in grief in that beings are born, they are subject to decay, they die and going away from this existence are born again elsewhere.].

This is his declaration of the Dhamma which, in its realistic presentation of the ills of life, and offering a solution to it, is essentially wholesome in every way. *So dhammaṃ deseti ādikalyāṇaṃ majjhe kalyāṇaṃ pariyosānakalyāṇaṃ sātthaṃ sabyañjanam...* As an invariable adjunct to this, he also announces the way of release he has discovered for the humans to get out of it... *kevala-paripunṇaṃ* [= completely adequate] *parisuddhaṃ* [= immaculate] *brahmacariyaṃ* [the higher religious life] *pakāseti*. [DN. I. p.62].

It is convincingly clear from the above that as much as the Dhamma as the teachings of the Buddha is invariably tied up with its goal of Nirvana, the way to its attainment also seems to be fundamentally inseparable from the way of religious life referred to as *brahmacariya*.

The appearance of the Buddha in the world and his preaching of the totally wholesome teaching, rich in detail and essence and his proclamation of the way of higher life which is immaculate and is completely demanding [*dhammaṃ deseti ādi-kalyāṇaṃ majjhe-kalyāṇaṃ pariyoṣāna-kalyāṇaṃ sātthaṃ sabyañjanaṃ kevalaṃ parisuddhaṃ paripuṇṇaṃ brahma-cariyaṃ pakāseti.*] is very accurately recorded, in its proper sequence, in the suttas as we have already shown above.

This is followed by the observation made by those who listen to his teaching with a genuine interest in it [*So taṃ dhammaṃ sutvā tathāgate saddhaṃ paṭilabhati...*]. They observe that it is not easy to practice well Buddhism's higher religious life while living a householder's life [*Nayidaṃ sukaraṃ agāraṃ ajjhāvasatā ekantaṃ parisuddhaṃ paripuṇṇaṃ brahmacariyaṃ caritun ' ti*]. This lends support to the position that pursuit of Nirvana and the observance of the monastic life seems almost inseparably tied up together. This unquestionable invariability of the early monastic image is seen in this remarkably beautiful utterance of the Muni Sutta of the Sutta Nipāta.

*Sikhī yathā nīlagīvo vihaṅgamo haṃsassa nopeti javaṃ kudācanaṃ
evaṃ gihī nānukaroti bhikkhuno munino vivittassa vanamhi jhāyato.*

Sn. v. 221

Just as the blue-necked crested peacock can never equal the swan in speed in its flight, even so does the layman never equal the bhikkhu who meditates in the solitude of the forest.

[Translated by the author]

In Buddhism, one must not lose sight of this invariability, this partiality towards or emphasis on renunciation or the choice of a life of *pabbajjā* in one's keenness in the pursuit of the goal of *nibbāna*. We also wish to add that the pursuit of *nibbāna* as one's spiritual goal, according to the suttas, also always implied being on a special track of discipline and training called *sikkhā*. This is categorically declared to be gradual or *anupubba* [*anupubba-sikkhā*].

It is also graduated through three stages, namely of *sīla* or moral development, *samādhi* or mind culture and *paññā* or wisdom acquisition.

Monk or layman, this seems to be the one and only way of spiritual development indicated in early Buddhism. It is the degree and intensity of application of this process of *sikkhā* that gets the average worldlying both away from the ramifying involvement with the world of ensnaring pleasure and also getting him nearer to the transcendentalism [*nissarana*] in *nibbāna*. It is worth noting here the story of the Vajjiputtaka monk whom the Buddha personally instructed to respect the three-fold *sikkhā* as the way for his spiritual grooming in view of his confessed inability to abide by the large number of Pātimokkha rules which the monks were normally required to observe [See AN. I. 230f.].



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2. Early affirmation of renunciation as being invariably tied up with the earnest pursuit of Nirvana.

This is clearly recorded in very reliable and authentic texts, in the sincere words of earnest disciples, in the early days of the Sāsana: *So taṃ dhammaṃ sutvā tathāgate saddhaṃ paṭilabhati. So tena saddhā-paṭilābhena samannāgato iti paṭisañcikkhati. Saṃbādho gharāvāso rajo-patho. Abbhokāso pabbajjā. Nayidaṃ sukaraṃ agāraṃ ajjhāvasatā ekanta-paripuṇṇaṃ ekanta-parisuddhaṃ sarikha-likhitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ caritūṃ. Yannūnā' haṃ kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajeyyan' ti.* [DN. I.62 Sāmaññaphala Sutta].

"He hears this teaching [*dhamma*] of the Buddha and conceives faith and acceptance [*saddhaṃ*] in the Master [*tathāgate*]. Endowed with this faith, he reflects thus: Life in the household is full of impediments. It leads to defilement. Life of a recluse is open and unhindered. Living a householder's life, it is not easy to live this higher spiritual life of *brahmacariya* which is totally pure and totally demanding. It were better if I shaved off my head and beard, and donned dyed clothing [*kāsāyāni* is not yellow], and took to a form of homeless living."

[Translated by the author]

3. Thus we find the Buddha's very first disciple AññātaKoṇḍañña, on gaining his **initial insight into the dhamma** [i.e. *dhamma-cakkhuṃ udapādi*], after listening to the Dhamma-cakkappavattana Sutta, sought from the Buddha admission into his monastic order. [*Atha kho āyasmā aññātaKoṇḍañño diṭṭhadhammo ... Bhagavantam etadavoca. Labheyyā ' haṃ bhante bhagavato santike pabbajjam labheyyam upasampadan ' ti.* Vin.I. p.12 = Thereupon venerable Aññāta-Koṇḍañña, having gained his initial vision, ... made this request to the Buddha. May I, O Lord, receive admission into the monastic order under you and higher-grade ordination, too.].

4. This transition from lay life to one of *pabbajjā* implied a great deal of sacrifice and surrender of one's possessions of diverse sorts, of persons and property. So run the early texts.

So aparena samayena appaṃ vā bhogakkhandhaṃ pahāya mahantaṃ vā bhogakkhandhaṃ pahāya appaṃ vā ñātiparivaṭṭaṃ pahāya mahantaṃ vā ñātiparivaṭṭaṃ pahāya kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajati. DN. I. p.63 = At some point of time later, he gives up a great or small amount of wealth, leaves behind a large or small community of kinsmen, shaves off his head and beard, and donning dyed clothing, takes to a form of homeless living or pabbajjā.

[Translated by the author]

This ability to abandon and surrender is a hall-mark of the path to Nirvana [*vossagga-pariṇāmiṃ*].

5. The result of this is a tremendous lead which the *pabbajita* gains over the lay worldling in his spiritual journeying towards the goal of Nirvana. We have already referred above to the glorification of this in the **Muni Sutta** of the **Sutta Nipāta** [*Sikhī yathā nīlagīvo vihaṅgamo* etc.].

6. It becomes clear from the quotations given above that there is **only one single way to Nirvana** and that **both monk and layman** should **move in the same direction, treading the same path**. It has to be **a stepping out of or departure from** the way of **household life**. It also becomes abundantly clear that **the life-style adopted by the disciple who has taken to a monastic career**, through **its very basic spirit of renunciation** of everything that is characteristic of life in the household, **facilitates the aspired process of spiritual perfection**.

7. We have already noted that this process of spiritual perfection in Buddhism is

termed ***sikkhā***. It literally means **culture, training and nurturing**. It goes through three gradual ascending stages of ***sīla*** or graduation in moral rectitude, ***samādhi*** or regulated mind-culture and ***paññā*** which, with the growth and development provided by the two preceding processes of culture, gets the human individual near enough to the real source of wisdom which enables him to acquire first-hand knowledge about the realities of life. This three-fold, three-tiered process is collectively called ***tisso sikkhā***. **They are compulsorily successive**. None cannot be by-passed, for no reason whatsoever.

And the reality of life which is to be realized and comprehended as a basic ingredient in this context is the three-fold characteristics of life in the world called the ***tilakkhaṇa*** or three signata of ***anicca dukkha*** and ***anatta***. It is this realization, seeing life through this tunnel of vision, that enables the total withdrawal - ***nibbēda virāga*** and ***vimutti*** - from ***samsāric*** involvement of life in the world.

8. There is ample evidence in early Buddhist texts to show that wherever any single individual, man or woman, gained sufficient depth of conviction with regard to the message of Buddhism as a solution to the ills of life, he or she hardly stopped short of making a request to the Buddha for admission as a disciple. It is, as it were, that this discipleship invariably carried with it apprenticeship under the Master. This is the pattern of monasticism that we envisage in the early days of the Sāsana where conviction was immediately followed by the choice of the most efficient and speedy way of ***pabbajjā*** to terminate the sufferings of ***samsāric*** life.

Every convinced disciple opted to make this request to the Buddha and the Buddha in turn admitted them into his fold with the words 'Come in, O monk, live this life of ***brahmacariya*** to make a complete end of suffering = ***Ehi bhikkhu. Cara brahmacariyaṃ sammā dukkhassa antakiriyāyā 'ti***. This is indeed a very grand beckoning in no uncertain terms. The circumstances under which the conversions or the convictions took place may vary. But all persons, from Aññāta

Koṇḍañña, via Yasa Kulaputta, Sāriputta and others, and among women, Vāseṭṭhi at Thig. 137 and Uppalavaṇṇā at Thig.226 [on her own initiative], and finally up to Subhadda, ended up in this choice of apprenticeship under the Buddha for *pabbajjā*, for a life of *brahmacariya* [from home to homelessness].



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9. Discipleship under the Buddha [Samaṇe Gotame brahmacariyaṃ vussati].

Let us begin, taking a closer look at the Indian terms *brahma-cariya* and *dhamma-vinaya* which were in vogue at the time of the appearance of Gotama as a seeker after liberation for mankind [*nissarana*], beyond the ills of the world [*Kudāssu nāma imassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa anatakiriya paññāyethā 'ti. =*]. What he discovered in Nirvana as the termination of the continuance of the *saṃsāric* process of births and deaths [*yattha vṛtaṃ na vaṭṭati.*] was a bliss beyond the world [= *lokuttara*], yet attainable with human effort alone [*sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā*] and within this very life-time [*diṭṭheva dhamme*] and within the dimensions of this very physical world [*imasmiṃ byāmatte kalebare*].

Starting with the very first Five Disciples [*Pañcavaggiyā Bhikkhū*], the Buddha appears to have worked zealously with them, almost with personal

supervision, taking them in groups of two and three in turn, till he finally saw them through their graduation into liberation in Nirvana. Such teacher-pupil institutions of very high religious, academic and institutional quality were already in existence in India at the time.

Discipline was a vital ingredient in most Sramaṇa institutions of the times who believed in living the religious life. They did not indulge in mere theorizing about the identity of the world and the self. Gotama was lucky to have worked with two such Masters of great distinction like **Alāra Kālāma** and **Uddaka Rāmaputta** who took Gotama almost to the neighbourhood of Nirvana. [It is recorded that they both did find Gotama an excellent student, achieving the highest they could offer, the seventh and the eighth *arūpī jhānas* respectively. But Gotama discovered that his goal was well outside these, both being within the *saṃsāric* orbit.]. The package they delivered to him, he discovered was inadequate [*Taṃ dhammaṃ analaṃ karitvā nibbija pakkāmiṃ*].

It is very revealing to note that in seeking enrollment under both these teachers, one after the other, the terms Gotama used were 'that he wishes to live the life of *brahmacariya* in their religious dispensations', referred to by the name of *dhamma-vinaya* [*lcchām ' ahaṃ āvuso Kālāma imasmiṃ dhammavinaye brahmacariyaṃ caritun ' ti*]. All these religious leaders or philosopher thinkers of the day had their own theories about life and its implications. Their thinking and the religious set-up which grew around it together constituted their specific *dhamma-vinaya*. The institutionalized living of it under the teacher was the invariable adjunct of *brahmacariya*.

10. The basic Buddhist monastic frame of good behavior - the life of the *pabbajita*.

The Buddha in his admonitions to his disciples during the early history of the Sāsana, is constantly seen telling them of the need to discipline themselves in terms of their chosen career. A regular refrain that occurs in the suttas runs as

Evaṃ hi vo bhikkhave sikkhitabbaṃ = You should discipline yourselves, O monks, in this manner. It is in order that a ***bhikkhu***, i.e. a ***pabbajita*** or one who has renounced his household life and taken seriously to the life of a recluse, be of exemplary good behavior, in word and deed and mode of living. He should serve as a model of good conduct to the rest, both monk and layman.

The ***dhamma*** is held out all the time as the proper yardstick of measurement for this. Thus runs the text. ***Dhammaṃ sakkaronto dhammaṃ garukaronto dhammaṃ apacāyamānā suvacā bhavissāmā ' ti evaṃ hi vo bhikkhave sikkhitabbaṃ*** []. The Pabbajjā Sutta of the Sutta Nipāta picks up this theme of self-correction and gives us, more or less, a standard version from the life of the Buddha himself, indeed as the best exemplary model.

*Pabbajitvāna kāyena pāpakammaṃ vivajjayi
vacīduccaritaṃ hitvā ājīvaṃ parisodhayi.*

Sn. 407

On becoming a monk [*pabbajitvāna*], Gotama avoided **evil through bodily action**. Giving up **evil through word**, he cleansed his **mode of living** too.

[Translated by the author].

If we take a closer look at these three items of good discipline from the Pabbajjā Sutta quoted above as model behavior in the life of a ***pabbajita***, we notice how closely they compare with the vast ***sīlakkhandha*** or **Chapter on Sīla**, consisting of three divisions [Preliminary, Medium and Major], in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. The **Sāmaññaphala Sutta**, we would choose to hold, as the **charter par excellence** of Buddhist monastic life [quite apart from its being an edited sutta or not]. In our opinion, both as a descriptive and a prescriptive sutta, it seems to start where it should start and end where it should end. The very spinal column of the **threefold culture** in Buddhism of ***tisso sikkhā*** of **moral development**, **mind-culture** and **wisdom acquisition** runs through in **successive stages** through the entire process of spiritual development of the

monk.



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11. Pre-legalized or Pre-sikkhāpada phase of monastic life in Buddhism.

There seems to be a mellow sweetness in the air when we discover the Buddha recounting an earlier phase in the Sāsana when his disciples won his heart [*ārādhayiṃsu vata me bhikkhave cittaṃ ekaṃ samayaṃ*. MN. I. 85, 341?] by their attentive and submissive behavior. They needed no regulative injunctions, the Buddha says [*Tesu bhikkhusu na anusāsanī karaṇīyā ahoṣi*]. It was only a reminder that was needed [*Satuppādakaraṇīyaṃ eva ahoṣi*]. Each one, as it were, had been individually and adequately screened.

There were, no doubt, many erring disciples like Aritṭha, Moliya Phagguna, and Sāti who misunderstood and distorted and thereby misrepresented the teachings, as well as others like Bhaddāli who resisted any regulations or corrections with regard to behavior patterns. But that was understandably due to multiple reasons. And barring a few very stubborn cases, the Buddha was able to straighten out these miscreants, with minimum damage to the persons or to the community.

Sīla being originally the basic and primary foundation of religious life in Buddhism, both for monk and layman, we find the ***pabbajita*** too, commencing his monastic career by taking upon himself **the observance of abstaining from** [***paṭivirato***] diverse activities or patterns of behavior which, in the first instance, are **neither good nor acceptable even for laymen by normal standards of good morality**, and **therefore much less for the monks**. The **Sāmaññaphala Sutta** begins the description in this manner. *So evaṃ pabājito samāno pāṇātipātāṃ pahāya pāṇatipātā paṭivirato... []*

This observation about abstinence from unacceptable behavior is particularly true of the first four observances of the ***cūla*** - [Preliminary] ***sīla***, with the fifth one of abstinence from intoxicants and drugs added to it, which thereupon constitute the basic fivefold ***pañcasīla*** of Buddhism which, in the first instance, **with firm avowal of trust** [*avecca- ppasādena samannāgato*] **in the Buddha Dhamma and Sangha**, initially grooms the layman for an essentially religious life. [We believe this essentially implies entry into Buddhism as a religious creed.]. This first prerequisite, when completely perfected, is said to immunize one from degrading into the four lower states of existence or ***niraya*** [*khīṇa-nirayo*]. One who is perfected up to that state is definitely destined to his goal of Enlightenment in Nirvana [*niyato sambodhiparāyano*. AN.].

The grade of morality or ***sīla*** of the monk in Buddhism is seen gradually rising higher as he abstains from forms of behavior of word and deed as well as of community involvement which may be permissible for the laymen, **but certainly not for the monk any more - *assāmaṇakam***, on account of his avowed renunciation. The other two grades of ***sīla***, i.e. Medium [***majjhima***] and Major [***mahā***] differ from the first, more in their complexity than in their gravity or severity. What is noteworthy with these items of ***sīla*** is **their moral uplift** through **their personal self-choice**. They are **not institutionally imposed** injunctions, carrying with them the **possibility of prosecution** and **punishment**.

We have already referred above to this nature of moral development in the Sāsana, in the direction of Nirvana, **via the correction of one's inter-personal relationships in society**, not only in relation to humans, **but even to the animal world**. The very first precept under *sīla*, namely **the one ensuring respect for the life of all living things - *sabba-pāṇa-bhūta-hitānukampī*** - has a **tremendously large coverage of moral goodness**. This concept of '**Compassion - the Ultimate Ethic**' [*Ahiṃsā paramo dharmā*], was shared by the Buddhists, at that very early age of more than twenty-five centuries ago, perhaps in the whole world, only with the Jains of India.

Not only has **religion** in its loftier realms of **morals and ethics of living**, [and not of mere talking about them theoretically] to talk about **this philosophy of live and let live in relation to all life in the universe**, but even **science**, through its continuous investigations into the problems of life in the universe, **has today come to this same conclusion** that unless humans, leaving their dogmatic religious decrees aside, come to this saner conclusion of **respecting all forms of life in the universe, collaterally**, their chances of survival on this planet would be precariously reduced to less than nil, even with the powers of grace sought from beyond them. [See writings like **Biophilia Hypothesis**, published during the last decade of the 20th century, for scientific analyses and prophecies on this subject.].

The remaining four precepts of the *Pañcasīla* cover **essentially the down-to-earth domain of the humans globally**, irrespective of the differences of their caste, creed and religious faiths. This is why under the renowned Buddhist theme of the **Universal Monarch** or *Rājā Cakkavatti*, the basic fivefold *pañcasīla* of Buddhism is offered by the said monarch to all the vassal kings who come to him from the four regions of the earth, pledging loyalty to him, and **seeking from him instruction as to how they should rule their territories**.

After itemizing the five precepts one by one, and insisting that they be

respected in their territories under their governments [*Pāṇo na hantabbo adinnaṃ na ādātabbaṃ kāmesu na micchā caritabba musā na bhaṇitabbā suraṃ na pātabbaṃ* = No life should be destroyed, no theft should be committed, no impropriety of sexual behavior be indulged in, no dishonesty of speech and no use of intoxicants or drugs which impair sanity of judgement.], the Monarch concludes, with perfect neutrality and freedom from inherited political bias, by indicating to them very clearly that they **do not need to re-structure the hitherto adopted political pattern of their kingdoms.**

This obviously is **far too advanced an item of political philosophy** for the **English speaking** [more precisely non-Buddhist thinking] **world of today.** Regrettably the Pali of this injunction [*Yathā-bhuttañ ca bhujatha*] has **not been accurately understood**, and therefore **not translated into English correctly.** It just means none other than **'Carry on your forms of government as you have done so far'**. The Buddhist idea here seems to imply that they do not believe in the need for any globalization of a political ideology. **Political correctness is by no means a creed monopoly.** It is to be tested in the efficiency of its operation. It is the **moral goodness amidst the people that rules the land and maintains law and order.**

That is why it is absolutely necessary to recognize this basic significance of good morality or *sīla* in Buddhism, whether it be **for the good life of the layman or the monk**, or **for happiness in this life or in a world beyond this.** This is much more true in one's pursuit of the goal of Nirvana or the reaching out for Enlightenment, by whatever name one calls this target - what one achieves or how one achieves it. We categorically reject the idea of short-circuiting this process. The grade should have been made, pre-requisites acquired, sometime, somewhere, here or elsewhere, even in a previous existence.

As Buddhists, we do firmly believe **in the possibility of continuance and transmission of Saṃsāric evolution and development**, from **one birth to another, while being human.** [Degraded states of existence like *niraya*, *apāya* and *vinipāta*

are by no means **proper nurseries for religio-cultural development.**] Vinaya injunctions in the life of a *pabbajita* only negatively guard against possible lapses through word and deed [*kāyika-vācasika-ajjhācāra-nisedhanato*] rather than assist gradual growth as via the instrumentality of *sīla*.

The total coverage through the three-fold division of *sīla* [as Preliminary, Medium and Major], on the other hand, contains the complete moral correction of word and deed as well as modes of livelihood [i.e. social involvement of a monk with the lay community in terms of giving and taking and manipulating their domestic activities] of one who has taken to the life of renunciation. This is more positive in spirit and action. This is what was said of the Buddha too, as the Buddha aspirant, in the Pabbajjā Sutta of the Sutta Nipāta [*Pabbajitvāna kāyena pāpakammaṃ vivajjayi Vacīduccaritaṃ hitvā ājīvaṃ parisodhayi* = Having taken to the life of a monk, he abstained from evils of bodily action. Refraining himself from guilt of speech, he cleansed himself in his modes of living. Sn. 407].

This is **the primary and basic correction** which a *pabbajita* has to embark upon on entering into the new way of life, from home to homelessness, in search of Nirvana. This has to be equally valid today and tomorrow, whether in the old or the new millennium. Modernization of monk-life today, east or west, cannot interfere with it. The monk shall not qualify without it, for the count-down for his take-off, off the launch-pad of worldly-life of Saṃsāra-dwelling. It has an intense gravitational pull which drags him down. The worldling needs the full power-development of **pabbajjā-engines** for the complete tear off from it. Failing which, the monk then comes to exist only by another mock name, not as a true *pabbajita* who has gone forth from home to homelessness - *agāasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajito* - for an unalterably fixed purpose of Nirvana landing. He has to be taken off the launch-pad and adequately powerful new engines which will stand up to the count-down have to be put in place.



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Early Beginnings of the Legalized Monastic Discipline Of The Vinaya Pitaka

The Historical situation and the Legendary assumptions.

The best approach for the study of this, we believe, is via the introductory portion to the **Suttavibhanga**, given under the name of **Verañjabhāṇavāra**.

**Let it be clearly stated at the very outset that the establishment of the Legalized Monastic Discipline of the Vinaya Piṭaka does by no means alienate or segregate the Buddhist *pabbajita*, who is expected to be seeking his goal of *brahma-cariya-pariyosāna*, from the true spirit of monasticism of the early Buddhist disciple. He is portrayed in the teachings of the Sutta Piṭaka, i.e. the Dhamma as against the Vinaya, with an unmistakable clarity of vision and an unquestionable sincerity of purpose. [As for example *tadanuttaraṃ brahmacariyapariyosānaṃ diṭṭheva dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā* or *Evaṃ gihī nānukaroti bhikkhuno munino vivittassa vanamhi jhāyato*: Suttanipata / Muni Sutta.]

Buddhist monastic history constantly tells us that up to about the first twelve years of the Sāsana there never was felt the need to legislate with regard to the behaviour pattern of the members of the Buddhist Sangha. We have already had it from the Buddha himself, on a comparative relative reckoning at a particular point of time in relation to a much earlier date. This observation by the Buddha himself, as the Master and the founder of the institution of the Sangha, is

extremely revealing.

He indicates that the current behaviour of the bhikkhus was, to some extent, a little disturbing. This is the beginning in the Sangha of **'fermentation of disorder from within'**

- generating multiple toxic by-products. This observation is already made about what was happening within the corpus of the Buddhist community and is referred to in the **Verañjabhāṇavāra** quoted above as *yadā sanghe āsavaṭṭhāniyā dhammā pātubhavanti*. We have no doubt that the Buddha was apprehensive of this and saw immediately the need for corrective remedial action. And he did take it. That is what led to the **beginning of the legalized discipline** within the Buddhist community.

He felt that the old theme of the Sāsana [i.e. **guided under the direction of the Dhamma, monks should correct and discipline themselves** = *dhammaṃ sakkaronto dhammaṃ garukaronto dhammaṃ apacāyamānā suvacā bhavissāmā* ' *ti evaṃ hi vo bhikkhave sikkhitabbaṃ.*] was now becoming a far cry, its echo, as it were, fading out. Miscreants were on the increase. Increasing crimes had to be arrested [*tesaṃ paṭighātāya* MN. I.445]. New controls had to be soon set up. Moral instructions, in their mild form of *sīla*, as already witnessed in discourses like the **Sāmaññaphala Sutta**, had to **be re-structured**, and **legally empowered** for the **prosecution and punishment of offenders** who observe the precepts in the breach.

This is well and truly **the historical position** which immediately preceded [over a period of nearly two decades] the need to formulate legal enactments to regulate monastic discipline, both by prosecuting offenders and by enforcing specified punishments. But we notice in Buddhist history from its earliest days, a tendency to justify and authenticate whatever Buddha Gotama says and does, by referring to the behaviour pattern of the Buddhas of the past.

The Buddhists had inherited, and we believe from fairly early times, a tradition of six Buddhas of the past. According to tradition, they are **Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana** and **Kassapa**. Two primary sources of information for this is the **Mahāpadāna Sutta** of the Dīgha Nikāya and the **Buddha Vagga** of the Samyutta Nikāya. According to the **Theragāthā**, they all tread the same **highway of old** [referred to as *porāṇaṃ maggaṃ porāṇaṃ añjasam*]. The Buddhists are clear that it is **not the old Indian way of the Brāhmaṇas and the Upanishads**. They wish others to know this.

*Yen 'eva maggena gato Vipassī ten 'eva maggena Sikhī ca Vessabhū
Kakusandha-Koṇāgamano ca Kassapo tenañjasena agamāsi Gotamo.*

Thag. v. 490

By whatever road Vipassi went, by the same road did Sikhī and Vessabhū as well as Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana and Kassapa go. By that very road of the former Buddhas did Gotama go.

[Translated by the author]

The **Mahāpadāna Sutta** of the Dīgha Nikāya present to us the **Six Buddhas of the Past** as facsimile reprints of the Buddha Gotama, projected backwards into hoary antiquity, we would say. With the Buddhist acceptance of the cyclical continuance of the cosmic process, there seems to be nothing surprising or strange about the Buddhists upholding such a view. It accords very well with the Buddhist theory of Saṃsāric evolution. Why worry about the number of Buddhas being six, twenty-four or twenty-eight, or whether we get them from the Jain Tirthaṅkaras or vice versa? The genuine research here should be to understand **the real Buddhist motive** in getting **Gotama to accord with**, more or less, **the eternal tradition of the Buddhists, throughout time**.

In the **Verañjabhāṇvāra** story, we see an ingenious dove-tailing of what we

have so far discussed as the 'historical situation' and the 'legendary assumption'. The **circumstances under which monastic discipline comes to be legalized** and the **justification for it** are both **convincingly presented, before the jury**, as it were.

Basing himself on the evidence of the legendary assumptions [i.e. of the stories of the Buddhas of the past], Sāriputta is seen trying to tell the Buddha Gotama that those Buddhas of the past who did not legalize their codes of monastic discipline [i.e. did not lay down sikkhāpadas] and institute the ritual of the Pātimokkha, witnessed in their own life time the total collapse of their monastic organizations.

Very historically and realistically, the Buddha brushes him aside and tells him to leave it to the Buddha himself who knows the proper time for it. He says that he is on the look out for signs of decadence, *āsavaṭṭhāniyā dhammā* and that he would take necessary timely action then to arrest decay. The reasons the Buddha offers for this line of action cover major areas like the comfort and convenience of the larger body of the monastic community or Sangha [*saṅgha-phāsutāya saṅgha-suṭṭhātāya*], the arrest of miscreants [*dummaṅkūnaṃ puggalānaṃ niggahāya*] and the furtherance of monastic aspirations, among others [*brahmacariya-anuggahāya*].

In the legalization of the disciplinary machinery of the Sangha, i.e. in trying to bring it to be acceptably on par with the legal set up of the state, an apparent drastic in the ethical value of discipline appears to have set in. Note for instance the **sīla** injunction *pāṇātipātā veramaṇī* regarding the Buddhist respect for all forms of life, both human and animal. It is in fact the first precept in list of **sīlas**. In bringing this one of destruction of life into the category of the most serious of the ecclesiastical offenses, namely he Pārājikā, the Vinaya has taken a very meaningful line of action. The Pārājikās, as the very name **Defeat** implies, deprive an offender of his monastic standing. He is irrevocably expelled from his status as a monk. He has undeniably failed in his spiritual carrier.

But for this severity of punishment to get a backing from the state, the destruction of life had to be elevated to that of man slaughter. Hence in legalized discipline of the Vinaya, destruction of life gets into two distinct areas of 1. human and 2. animal. Destruction of human life or *manussa-viggaha* gets into the category of Pārājikā as No 3. However, the respect for animals is still brought within the legalized Vinaya rules of a lesser category, namely the Pācittiya [Pācittiya 61].

It is amazing to find that a new monastic institution called 'the initiation into **the four never-to-be-done** or *Cattāri Akaraṇīyāni Ācikkhitabbāni*' is imposed on every new monk immediately after his admission to the senior status of an *upasampanna* [*Upasampanna-samanantarā cattāri akaraṇīyāni ācikkhitabbāni*]. This requires that every *upasampanna* accepts, **in an extra-legal atmosphere**, to respect the totality of the spirit of the Four Pārājikā rules, which in the process of legalization, might have lost a portion of their moral and ethical significance.

Thus while under the **legally prosecutable and punishable category of Pārājikā, item No. 3**, which refers to destruction of life includes only man-slaughter, the newly included religio-ethical considerations of **four never-to-be-done** or *Cattāri Akaraṇīyāni* ensures that an *upasampanna*, shall not, all his life, kill even a bed bug. **Pārājikā item No. 2** which deals with theft, also suffered a change in the process of legalization. In terms of the state law, the value of the stolen article had to be fixed for purposes of legal prosecution. Vinaya accepts it and fixes it in terms of the currency of the day. But the *Cattāri Akaraṇīyāni* immediately rises to the occasion to pronounce that an *upasampanna* shall not steal even as much as a blade of grass. **Pārājikā 1** and **4** have suffered very little change worth talking about.

One thing special must be said about this process of legalizing monastic discipline. It needs very careful fool-proofing in order not to defeat the very

purpose it intends to serve. It is in this spirit that the Buddha advised the Vajjiputtaka monk to be more concerned with the spirit of the **three-fold sikkhā** than the check on the several items of the **sikkāpada**.



IBUC 2001 - BA / VMO Vinaya and the Buddhist Monastic Order

Bhikkhu Professor Dhammavihari

2001 - Question Paper

- Three hours Answer Five questions only.

1. The early Buddhist teachings about **Samsāra** and **Nirvāna** seem invariably to lead to an attitude of *pabbajjā* or renunciation. Discuss in relation to the emergence of the monastic ideal in Buddhism.
2. 'Respecting the Dhamma, and keeping the Dhamma as your guide, you should develop your lives to perfection ' says the Buddha in the early Sutta tradition. Historically examine the adequacy of this injunction, pointing out the time of its collapse.
3. What changes of character does **legalization of moral behaviour** bring about in the life of *brahmacariya*, particularly under the pressure of social considerations? Explain the attitude taken by the Buddha in the working out of this process.
4. The *pabbajita* has yet to live in society. Therefore both the *sīlas* and the

- Vinaya *sikkhāpadas* mark out for him the frontier differences. Discuss, citing clear examples.
5. Discuss the full significance of the *Cattāri Akaraṇīyāni* [or the **Four Never-to-be-done**] in the life of a fully-ordained [*upasampanna*] monk as **Institutionalized but Non-legal Safeguards** for the maintenance of wholesome monastic discipline within the Order.
 6. The **Pātimokkha-uddesa** [the fortnightly reading out of the Patimokkha] by an appointed reciter [**Pātimokkha + uddesaka**] was **NOT** a **joint-recital** of the Vinaya or the Dhamma, **collectively undertaken by the bhikkhus**. Explain the origin of this function and the purpose it was intended to serve in the pioneering days of the Sāsana.
 7. The weakness of the personal factor, of partiality or prejudice of individuals, was carefully avoided in the '**discipline management**' of the Sāsana. Discuss, with reference to carefully built-in provisos like *Dhammo no kārentī no āyasmano* and *yathādhamma* and *yathāsattha* used throughout the Dhamma and the Vinaya.
 8. Buddhism, as a religious order never denied women their **right to renounce household life**. Recognizing the social perimeters of the day, corrective and conservative, restrictive and even life-threatening, Bhikkhuni Vinaya has **introduced several safeguards** to help them to pursue their religious aspirations with adequate security of mind and body. Discuss.
 9. A closer scrutiny of the **Satta [7] Adhikaraṇa-samatha Dhammā** [**procedure for settling ecclesiastical litigant issues**], common to both Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis, reveals a profound sense of justice and fair play in the process of prosecution and punishment in handling discipline within the monastic community. Discuss.

10. The monastic institution of **teacher-pupil-relationship** [*Ācariya + antevāsika* as well as *Upajjhāya+saddhivihārika*] in the Vinaya provides adequately for the growth of the monk in terms of this world and his ultimate goal. Discuss, with reference to the *abhisamācārikā* and *ādibrahmacariyikā sikkhā* prescribed under the duties of the **Ācariya** and **Upajjhāya**.